



Judiciary Committee Testimony, March 20, 2015

Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Mark Sarsfield. I am a Parole Officer and a representative of Council 4's three Correction Employee Locals: 391, 387 and 1565.

My testimony today is to request your support, with amendment, for House Bill 7028, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, ACCESS TO THE FIREARMS DATABASE BY PAROLE OFFICERS, AND PRESENTATION OF A CARRY PERMIT.

I have been employed with Department of Correction for twenty three (23) years, sixteen (16) of them supervising offenders in the community.

It is my understanding that a database currently exists and is in use by law enforcement personnel, including Adult Probation Officers assigned to CSSD. Because it contains information that may be helpful in determining whether a sponsor is being truthful regarding the presence of firearms on their property, I am requesting, through this amended bill (HB 7028), that Parole Officers be added as authorized users of this database.

Under the current supervision model, prior to an offender's release to Parole, Transitional Supervision, or any other status, a Parole Officer physically inspects the residence where the offender has requested to reside. Most often offenders stay with a friend or family member; we consider these people "sponsors". The purpose of visiting the residence and meeting with sponsors is to make a determination as to the suitability of both the residence and sponsor. We make every attempt to place offenders in conditions that will be conducive to their successful reentry.

As a condition of their release, supervised offenders shall not possess, control or have access to firearms, ammunition or other weapons. It follows then that they cannot reside in a location where those items are kept. During a Parole Officer's home investigation, sponsors are informed of this requirement and are asked to sign a form attesting that they will not have firearms, ammunition or weapons on their property while the offender resides with them on supervised release. At the present time, Parole Officers have no way to verify whether a sponsor is being completely truthful when questioned about firearms.

Parole Officers work in all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns. They are charged and entrusted with enforcing the release conditions set forth by the Department of Correction and the Board of Pardons and Paroles. At times, they are required to remand an offender from his/her residence or another location. Sometimes offenders cooperate, sometimes they do not. Most times sponsors cooperate, however sometimes they too interfere with the remand process. It is always an unpredictable situation in which the Parole Officers, and those assisting them, are putting themselves at risk. The best preparation for these situations is knowledge. Armed with the knowledge that there is, or has been, a history of firearms at a particular household is crucial to assessing the safest response possible for the Parole Officers and all stakeholders (ie. sponsors & their families, the offenders themselves, neighbors, State and local law enforcement, first responders, etc.)

It's worth noting that Parole Officers are already authorized users of the COLLECT system, NCIC, OBTS, JEB and other in- house systems. We understand the sensitive nature of the information we have access to and the responsibility that accompanies that.

With Governor Malloy's Second Chance Society initiative in mind, it is prudent to provide those charged with offender supervision the tools necessary to safely conduct the State's work. Connecticut lawmakers should strive to foster information sharing amongst all agencies of its criminal justice system.

Thank you for your time. I will answer any questions you have.